

*Legislation, Based on U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Recommendations, Calls on State Dept. to Conduct Review of Saudi Curriculum*

*Saudi Curriculum, Used in VA School, Has Previously Been Found to Promote Violence Against Non-Muslims and Disfavored Muslims*

Washington, DC— Today, U.S. Representatives Steve Israel (D-NY) and Frank Wolf (R-VA), Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations introduced legislation cracking down on Saudi extremism and suppression of religious freedom. Based on recommendations of a recent report issued by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the legislation calls on the Secretary of State to invoke the Foreign Missions Act to prevent Saudi extremism and hatred from being taught in Saudi-funded schools operating in the United States.

“I don’t believe that enduring peace and stability are possible when we seek to achieve peace only at high diplomatic altitudes instead of going into second grade classrooms,” said Congressman Israel. “All the peace treaties and diplomatic agreements in the world will not succeed as long as children are taught how to hate.”

“If the Saudi government really wants peace and stability, it will use its classrooms as laboratories of education and not incubators of hatred,” continued Congressman Israel. “It will nourish its children with modernity, rather than feeding them a steady diet of blame against the West. It will teach its children how to put things together, not incite them to blow things up.”

At least one Saudi school with two campuses operating in the United States reportedly teach curriculum from textbooks promoting religious intolerance and abuses of human rights against non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims. The Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) purports to be privately operated, but conducts education on Northern Virginia properties that are formally leased to the “Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.” Furthermore, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States is the chairman of the school’s board of directors and the school appears to be substantially funded by the Saudi government and has claimed to use government-condoned “curriculum, syllabus and materials.”

Israel and Wolf’s legislation asks the Secretary of State to immediately begin diplomatic discussions with the Saudi Government to close the Islamic Saudi Academy until the official

Saudi textbooks used there are made available for comprehensive public examination. The Secretary would be asked to conclude these discussions within 90 days and report back to Congress.

Besides addressing Saudi extremism in schools operating in the U.S., the legislation also points to specific points of concern relating to Saudi textbooks including:

- Findings by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), that the Government of Saudi Arabia has made insubstantial progress toward implementing its July 2006 policies relating to religious practice and tolerance
- Reports that the Government of Saudi Arabia's harsh enforcement of its interpretation of Islam adversely affects the human rights of women in Saudi Arabia, and the human rights of both Muslim and non-Muslim expatriate workers
- Evidence that official school textbooks in Saudi Arabia have previously included language encouraging violence that adversely affects the interests of the United States, and although they claimed publicly that it revised its textbooks they have not made a complete set of its current textbooks available to support its claim that such language has been eliminated. Moreover, in June 2007 USCIRF found evidence that intolerant and inflammatory text remains in the textbooks, which are used around the world

The legislation calls for additional steps to deal with problematic Saudi textbooks:

- States that we should continue to designate Saudi Arabia as a "country of particular concern" under the 6 International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom
- Asks the Secretary of State to create a mechanism to monitor implementation of the Government of Saudi Arabia's policies relating to religious practice and tolerance as part of every meeting of the United States-Saudi Arabia Strategic Dialogue, and report to Congress ever six months
- Asks the Secretary of State to submit to Congress a report on progress by the Government of Saudi Arabia toward implementing its July 2006 policies relating to religious practice and tolerance, including the transparency of the Government of Saudi Arabia toward the implementation of such policies; and any benchmarks or timetables established for implementation of such policies